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# “Let Us Deal With This Emergency”



By

GIFFORD PINCHOT

*Governor of Pennsylvania*



Text of Speech Delivered Before  
Mayor's Unemployment Com-  
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# “Let Us Deal With This Emergency”

By GIFFORD PINCHOT

*Governor of Pennsylvania*

The whole Nation, from Point Barrow to Key West, is in the grip of a great depression. There are two things we need to do about it. One of them is to seek a fundamental remedy through Nation planning—to substitute planned and orderly development of our resources, our production, and our institutions for the haphazard and unbalanced growth which has led to this depression. Nation planning is the way, and the only sure way, to avoid depressions in the future. But that is not my subject today.

The other need is to get ready to take care of the unemployed during the coming winter.

A depression like this one is not merely an economic calamity. It is a threat to our institutions. It supplies the soil for the growth of ideas of government hostile to our own. A depression is always a harvest time for revolutionists and other trouble makers. That is one of the real reasons for Nation planning to avoid depressions, and for taking care of those who suffer when depressions come.

I realize that what I am now about to say will undoubtedly be condemned, denounced, or ridiculed as a bid for the Republican presidential nomination. It is nothing of the sort. This Nation has come to a pretty pass if a man cannot say what needs to be said in the public interest without being charged with a political intention.

Is there any reason why it should be necessary for every man in the public eye who is not a candidate to keep still lest a candidacy should be imputed to him? If any person can get any fun out of charging me with sophistry, demagoguery, barratry, larceny, manslaughter, political heresy, candidacy, or any other crime because of this speech, he has my blessing. As for me, I propose to say what I think needs to be said, and let the heathen rage. What is the good of a man in high office if he sees the truth and will not tell it to the people?

The truth that I see with the utmost clearness is this: it is high time for the people of the United States to look next winter squarely in the face and begin to get ready for it.

Do not misunderstand me. I am hoping at least as earnestly as the next man for good times to come again. Perhaps I am looking even more earnestly than some who do not carry my responsibility. We are all most eager that the business pickup of next fall shall merge into prosperity.

But even if it does, the problem of next winter will not be solved. You cannot set six million idle men and women or more at work in a day, or a week, or a month, or a year. Next winter millions will go hungry unless we feed them, for they will not be able to feed themselves.

But we cannot let men and women willing to work go hungry in America. Above all, we cannot let their children sicken and die or be stunted for life for the lack of food. We cannot do that when food is a drug in the market.

Even after the tide has turned, the readjustment will be long delayed. It will be very costly in human suffering, unless we set ourselves to understand our problem and to meet it. I repeat that provision must be made so that people out of work in America shall not go hungry next winter.

Already we have seen the pregnant signs that men whose families lack the bare necessities of living are likely to regard it as their right to take food where they find it. And who among us can guarantee that he would not be tempted if his family were starving? With food so cheap that wheat is burned in the public street and grain in the field, who can wonder at the indignation of those who ask nothing more than the chance to earn food by the labor of their hands, and yet can find no job.

How shall we meet the problem? First, there is private charity. But those who know most about it are least confident that private charity can supply the answer. The figures I have appear to show that private charity in the United States has been carrying only about a quarter of the load, and tax funds the rest.

Private charity must be made to carry all it can. In addition to the millions already spent, the people of Pennsylvania are preparing through their local organizations to raise every possible cent from private sources. It will be no easy task, for the owners of great fortunes have not yet fully come to understand that the penalty for letting people go hungry next winter will apply not only to those who starve, but also to those who let them starve.

Roosevelt said that in the long run this country is not going to be a good place for any of us to live in unless it is a good place for all of us to live in. There are those in America who need to remember that statement.

Next there are public works. Public works have been widely heralded in high places as the remedy for unemployment. But we know now that public works on any scale yet undertaken can do little more than scratch the surface.

Pennsylvania will spend in the next two years about one hundred millions of dollars on public works. Time was when I believed here was in fact a remedy. But contact with the problem has shown me that in my State, at least, public works offer but a very partial solution. And most of the other States are in no better shape. They lack the money to build public works enough to occupy even a respectable fraction of their unemployed.

Unless on a gigantic scale, public works undertaken now will help us comparatively little in the coming winter. Not only are they too late, but the problem is too large. Mr. Hearst's suggestion for a National loan of \$5,000,000,000 would have gone far to meet the situation if it could have been adopted when it was made. It may still be necessary. But if the Congress which meets in December should authorize that loan, work under it could not be organized in time to meet the crisis.

The actual problem is not to make work for the needy in the coming winter months. The problem is to feed them, for we know already that work enough cannot be found.

By whom, then, shall they be fed? The obvious answer, if private charity cannot suffice, is that the

communities in which they live should look after their own. Home rule—home relief. Yes, if it were possible.

Unfortunately, the poor boards, counties, boroughs, cities of Pennsylvania, to use the example I know best, are many of them at the limit of taxation, if not of their authority to borrow. Many of them have exhausted their borrowing capacity under the State Constitution.

The people of many communities in Pennsylvania have almost completely expended their powers of relief. The slender margins which have permitted help from neighbor to neighbor are gone. Very many storekeepers can give further credit only at the cost of business failure. All this is substantially true at this moment in thirteen counties of Pennsylvania. And the winter is still to come.

Then how about the State? How about the rich State of Pennsylvania, with its ten million people and vast production of wealth? A perfectly fair question. And here is the unfortunate but conclusive reply:

Pennsylvania is prevented by a clause in its Constitution from incurring debt beyond a million dollars. It would require a Constitutional Amendment to let us borrow, and that takes several years.

Then why not call a special session of the Legislature and appropriate? Again the Constitution. Under it we cannot appropriate for such a purpose. I am profoundly sorry that I must admit it, but so far as money goes Pennsylvania as a Commonwealth is almost helpless to assist.

Many other States are in the same predicament. Many doubtless, as we do, have in their Constitutions clauses which in effect forbid the appropriation of State money for the purpose of relieving private distress.

In this emergency every agency that can help should help. No avenue of relief should be neglected; every possible contribution should be secured. But when all is said and done, there is no escaping the conclusion that more help is needed than is yet in sight.

Private charity alone cannot meet the needs of the winter that lies ahead. By itself it never has met



even the needs of normal winters. As a matter of practical fact great numbers of communities have passed the point where they can answer the new demands. Many of the States cannot, whether through public works, direct appropriations, or loans for relief, be counted on to fill the gap. All the old sources of assistance, utilized to the utmost, and taken together, clearly cannot do the job.

The fact is that the only power strong enough, and able to act in time, to meet the new problem of the coming winter is the Government of the United States. This is a National emergency. It is a National calamity as well. The Nation must help to meet it.

I know there is a deficit in the National Treasury. But I know also that the credit of the United States is good, and that the securities of the Nation are always in demand. The Nation can borrow the money to meet this need, if it will.

There will be strong objection that we have never taken such action before. Why have we not? Because we have never had such need before. Because never before has the mate of this calamity fallen upon our people. And if our Government cannot adjust itself to new conditions, meet new needs, how can it hope to survive?

There will be strong objection that my proposal is paternalistic—that it will pauperize the people whom the Nation saves from starving. Well, were the people pauperized whom the Nation saved from starving in the Mississippi Flood? Is there anything paternalistic when the Nation steps in to save the forests?

We spend thirty or forty million dollars for a single battleship, and we are right in spending it when the National defense requires the expenditure. But a defense for our Nation far more valuable than any engine of war lies in the loyalty of our people. And how can men and women be loyal to a country which refuses them the chance to earn a living and lets them starve besides?

We have heard from a thousand stumps that the greatest asset of the Nation is its children, and that is true. But millions of children in America are un-

derfed because of this depression. Millions of children are suffering for no fault of their own, and no fault of their fathers and mothers. If the Nation can protect its assets in timber without paternalism when no other agency can do the work, why cannot it protect its assets in the childhood of America.

Do you think that children who have been starved for a year, or two years, and some of them even longer, are likely to grow up as good Americans, devoted to the Government which let them starve?

Am I exaggerating? The head of the State Police of Pennsylvania came to me the other day and said: ¶ “The children of Western Pennsylvania miners are being trained to charge against the Government the sufferings through which they are passing. Their Communistic leaders are teaching them to hate the Government under which they go hungry.”

Again he said: ¶ “Many of these little children have not tasted milk for many months. I want to see them properly fed. I want to see them grow up strong and not stunted, kindly and not bitter, loyal and not disloyal to the Government under which they live.”

If we can declare a moratorium to help Germany, if we can recommend a loan of a billion two hundred million dollars for Germany, what is there wrong in a Federal loan to feed the needy in America?

A man can be in hearty sympathy with Mr. Hoover's moratorium, his loan for Germany, and his plan generally to pull Germany out of her troubles, and at the same time more interested in seeing the Government of the United States, the only power able to do it, take hold and pull our own people out of their troubles.

The saving of Germany is largely a question of protecting international loans. Very well. Let them be protected. But why not a little care for our own people who can no longer get loans, even from the pawnbroker, because they have nothing left to pledge?

This unemployment crisis, like every other calamity, has given us much reason to be thankful for the better qualities in human nature. Millions have been given to meet the needs of the unseen and the unknown who were in want. Millions of employes have



contributed generously from their earnings. Thousands of employes have strained their resources to keep employed without reduction of wages men and women who otherwise would have fallen into distress.

Very much has been done, and well done, by individuals, by communities, by labor unions, by companies and corporations, and by employes, to meet the need. Millions have given until it hurt. In very many respects our people have borne themselves in a way we can all be deeply proud of.

We ought not, then, to mar the record of what we have done by failing to relieve what we pray God may not be the greater and more insistent distress of the coming winter. With reserves exhausted, credit gone, possessions sold, and the margin of safety generally evaporated for millions of people, we cannot escape the paradoxical fact that if the coming winter is as bad as the last one it will be infinitely worse.

If the people of the United States had not proved time and again throughout their history that they are capable of meeting any emergency, the wisdom of speaking out in meeting might be in doubt. But wherever, throughout the world, a great calamity has overtaken masses of human beings, there the people of the United States have made glorious proof not only of their sympathy, not only of their generosity, but of their power to organize swiftly and to solve effectively the problems of feeding the hungry, clothing the needy, and sheltering the homeless, often many thousands of miles away.

We have proved it to the hilt in Belgium and the Great War, The American Red Cross, the Y. M. C. A., Knights of Columbus, Salvation Army, Young Men's Hebrew Association, and a thousand other National organizations have demonstrated on the battlefields and behind the lines in Europe that our people are little apt to count the cost when human suffering calls for relief. And they have proved it equally at home.

What is more to the point of my argument, the Government of the United States has appropriated money to give help to those in need in China, in India, in Ireland, in Cuba, in Italy, France, Germany, and other countries. If it was right to give such help to

foreign people abroad, why should it be wrong to give similar help to our own people at home?

What we have done over and over again for the unfortunate in distant lands we cannot fairly refuse to do for our own flesh and blood when they cry for help in our streets.

I have no doubt whatever of our capacity to do promptly and do well what the depression will require if it lasts, provided we begin to prepare in time. But no such gigantic problem of relief has ever been presented in the history of the Nation. My plea is that we recognize the magnitude of the task, think it out, and plan ahead for relief by the only agency that can complete the job, and that is Uncle Sam.

I have listened to human ostriches in plenty who, with heads deeply buried in the sand, maintain that blue is green and black is white, and all we need to cure this great calamity is to keep saying that there isn't any. I am tired of the emptyheaded declamation of orators whose simple theory is that everything would be for the best in the best of all possible worlds if the people would only take their word that it is so right now.

The goddess of these gentlemen is Pollyanna and their slogan: "Prosperity is just around the corner." But since their twitterings began we have rounded so many corners without finding the promised prosperity that even these muezzins in their rose-tinted minarets must have begun to doubt their own infallibility.

In what I have just said, I believe I speak for thousands of Americans who have been thinking much and saying little. I know that I am not alone in my conviction that the National Government must step in. If it does, I pledge myself to help in every way I can. Pennsylvania will carry her share of the load, to the limit of her power.

Some gentlemen of vast wealth may protest that Federal help means more Federal taxation. Suppose it does. I pay taxes myself in the higher brackets, and I would infinitely rather see my taxes raised than see millions of men, women, and children go hungry and cold in the land we love so well.

I go back again and again to that old American

saying, "Trust in the Lord and keep your powder dry." It will take many solid American dollars contributed by the National Government to feed the needy before next spring. I want to see them fed. Whatever is necessary to that end is necessary to the safety, honor, and welfare of the United States.

If so, let us do it and have done with it. Let us deal with this emergency, put it behind us, and move on to better things. After private charity has done its best, after the localities have given all they can, why keep the eyes of the Nation fixed on the depression throughout the coming winter by vain efforts to raise more money in dribblets from innumerable sources when the Government can raise it in a week by a single loan?

The Government of this country exists for the protection and preservation of its people. Let it carry out the purpose of its existence.

